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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to plan and implement a tutorial program in an elementary school setting to: (1) provide practical experience for undergraduates majoring in education; and (2) assist elementary students in the acquisition of basic skills on an individual basis. Students from a sophomore level survey class were selected to participate in this pilot program. It was determined that children in grades 1-4 needing additional assistance with reading, arithmetic, and general homework assignments would be organized into small groups with each college student having the opportunity to tutor on a rotating basis. All materials taught were a continuation of lessons previously introduced by the regular classroom teacher. Tutees in all grades showed some improvement with greatest improvement in reading and arithmetic found in grades 2-4. Classroom teachers were positive in their responses to the pilot program. Their suggestions included scheduling the same tutor with the same group of students for each visit and more advance notice on scheduling of tutor visits. The undergraduate students indicated that the experience brought them more confidence regarding their decision to become teachers, gave them practical knowledge about teaching, exposed them to varied teaching strategies, gave them practical grounding to theory, and allowed them a more realistic perspective of the teaching profession. (Contains 10 references.) (JLS)

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ED 405 317

TUTORIALS IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TAUGHT BY SOPHOMORES MAJORING IN EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESULTS OF A PILOT STUDY

A Paper

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Recent research studies support the premise that early experiences in actual school settings help to make relevant, the material presented in class to education majors at the "Entry to Program" level. There is a trend away from individual isolated courses and experiences within particular institutions to a more collaborative interactive approach to education (Goodlad, 1990). What undergraduates generally lack in skill and methodology is often replaced with enthusiasm and a sincere desire to learn that which is immediately necessary and applicable.

A tutorial program involving undergraduate volunteers and others at the Pottstown Homework Center Partnership in Pottstown County, Pennsylvania, supported at-risk middle-school students by providing individual assistance after school. The results of evaluations from the second and third academic years confirmed an increase in the achievement of students who participated on a regular basis (Bender, 1994).

In that both husband and wife, and single parents, often must be gainfully employed also creates a situation in which little or no time is available to assist children with practice and reinforcement homework assignments vital to the acquisition of basic skills. Primarily because of this reason, the James Lewis Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana, implemented a volunteer tutoring program a year and a half ago which has proven to be successful. This program consists of approximately forty adults from the community and undergraduates from Tulane University volunteering sixty minutes a week to provide individual

assistance to students in need. This special attention has proven to be very effective in the improvement of reading skills for the elementary students (Elie, 1996). A similar tutorial program in New Orleans, The Campus Alliance Program, involves approximately 26 volunteer undergraduates from Tulane and Xavier University working with 56 children on their homework assignments in the C. J. Peete Public Housing Project (Williams, 1996). An editorial in the Times Picayune recently stated that each undergraduate tutor volunteers for a minimum of ten hours a semester, and that the number of volunteer college student tutors is increasing. Tulane University's Community Action Council of Tulane University Students (CACTUS) has also been involved in similar volunteer community programs.

Utilization of volunteer tutors is not completely new. Volunteer tutors as a reading intervention for students with reading difficulties has consistently been a part of reading instruction since the middle seventies. A volunteer tutor program of this type has been especially successful at Minnesota University (Weiss, 1988). Another example is the "Scientists in the Classroom" program in the District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington, D.C.; in which scientists, mathematicians, and engineers were recruited to serve as tutors, lecturers, or mentors (Federal City Council, 1987).

Pulaski County Special School District's volunteer network is unsurpassed in the State of Arkansas in the number of hours dedicated annually to their schools (Pulaski County Special

School District, 1996). The Oakland Public Schools in California, has volunteers placed in their system of ninety schools as tutors, guest speakers, and with special projects. This school system also requires all classroom tutors to attend orientation and training sessions.

Public School 154 in South Bronx, New York, uses senior citizens recruited using a mailing list of the American Association of Retired Persons members. Sixteen volunteers work from 15 to 20 hours per week tutoring students in need of assistance with class assignments. Two introductory education courses at Northwest Missouri State University were designed to provide education majors with classroom experiences as early as their freshman and sophomore years (Bennerotte, 1993). In another North American school system, the University of Alberta and Edmonton teachers cooperated to place third-year education majors into early classroom experiences (Chamberlin and Vallance, 1991).

Tutorials at the university level have been successfully used in undergraduate developmental courses, nursing programs, and even in medical schools. For an example, a small-group problem-based tutorial was developed at the Harvard Medical School to discuss topics including students' written narratives, and a survey of tutors' perspectives (Wilkerson, 1994).

In that volunteer tutorial programs appear to be effective in a review of related literature, the importance of this study addresses both problems; undergraduates in education need to be in the schools as early as possible, and students in elementary

and middle-schools often are in need of individual assistance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to plan and implement a tutorial program in an elementary school setting (1) to provide practical experience for undergraduates majoring in education, and (2) to assist elementary students in the acquisition of basic skills on an individual basis.

Methodology

Beginning with the onset of the 1996 Spring Semester, a sophomore level survey class, "Introduction to Elementary and Secondary Education", was selected to participate in a pilot program involving volunteer teaching at a local traditional lower elementary school. Plans followed with support from the principal of the school, to organize the pilot program with adequate controls to ensure proper scheduling of students, under the supervision of regular classroom teachers, during the last period of the school day. In that the college undergraduates had not taken formal classes in methodology, it was surmised that skills in instruction would be lacking, but the acquisition of subject matter derived from matriculation through elementary and secondary school, and college core curriculum, would be an asset. It was determined that children in grades 1, 2, 3, and 4, needing additional assistance with reading, arithmetic, and general homework assignments, would be organized in small groups of three to four children, with each college student having an opportunity to tutor on a rotating basis, over a twelve-week period. Nine

regular classroom teachers volunteered their classes for participation.

The education survey class consisted of forty-four undergraduates. Thirty percent (13) were Secondary Education majors; two of which were in the Alternative Certification Program. Seventy percent (31) were Elementary Education majors; six of which were in the Dual Major Program pursuing additional certification in Special Education.

Seventy-two percent (32) were concurrently enrolled in a course involving methods of instruction for exceptional children. Sixty-three percent (28) had taken a course in either Child or Adolescent Psychology, and twenty percent (9) were either enrolled, or had taken Child Psychology. Only two persons had classroom teaching experience.

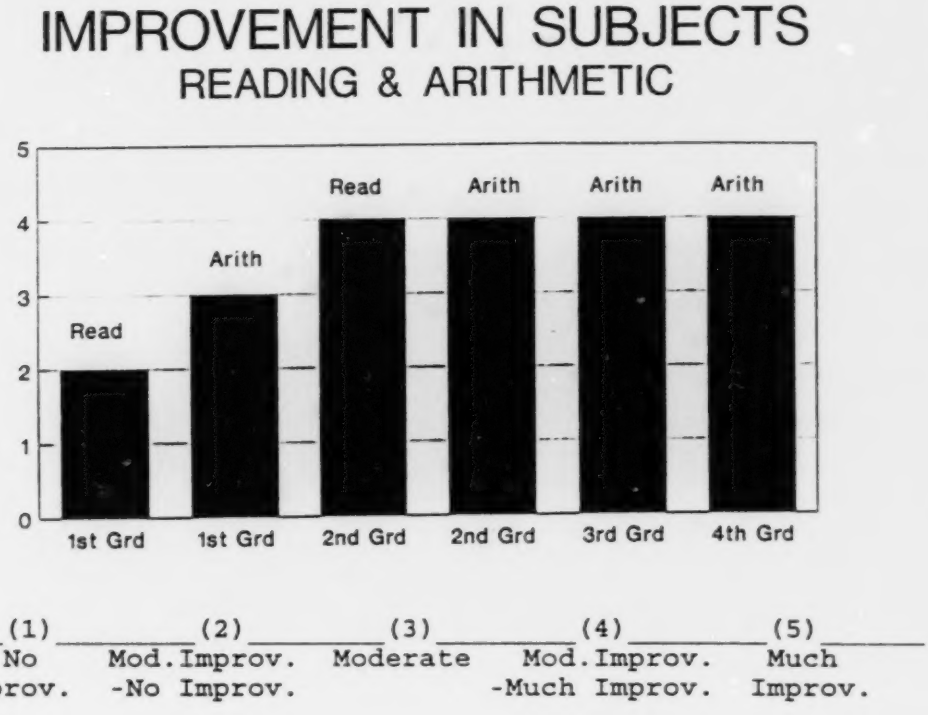
All materials taught in the tutorials were a continuation of lessons previously introduced by the regular classroom teacher. With this realization, the undergraduate tutors were compelled to become spontaneously innovative regarding the necessity for varied techniques of instruction. For example, a lesson for fourth graders concerning "the depletion of the atmospheric ozone layer", required an undergraduate secondary science major to scale down chalk illustrations to a lower elementary level. Another tutor had her students reading by rhyming a simple story.

Perceived gains in improvement in reading comprehension and arithmetic computation were recorded at the end of the twelve-week period using a five-point Likert-type scale. Also, utilized

were questionnaires of both open and closed construction. In essence, this study was to find new perspectives concerning methods to introduce undergraduates majoring in education into early practical interaction with students in a classroom, and to contribute to the improvement of reading and computational skills of the elementary students through individual assistance.

Results of the Study

Results of the pilot were reported according to three categories; (1) Perceptions of the Classroom Teachers regarding noticeable improvement in the areas of reading comprehension and arithmetic computation, (2) Comments of the Classroom Teachers with reference to "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Program", and (3) Perceptions of the Undergraduates serving as tutors.



Perceptions of the Classroom Teachers (6) regarding noticeable improvement in reading comprehension and arithmetic computation were recorded using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Results were as follows:

Reading Comprehension - Grade 1
"No Improvement to Moderate Improvement" (2 on the scale)

Reading Vocabulary - Grade 1
"No Improvement to Moderate Improvement" (2 on the scale)

Arithmetic Computation - Grade 1
"Moderate Improvement" (3 on the scale)

Reading Comprehension - Grade 2
"Moderate Improvement to Much Improvement" (4 on the scale)

Arithmetic Computation - Grade 2
"Moderate Improvement to Much Improvement" (4 on the scale)

Arithmetic Computation - Grade 3
"Moderate Improvement to Much Improvement" (4 on the scale)

Arithmetic Computation - Grade 4
"Moderate Improvement to Much Improvement" (4 on the scale)

** Social Studies and Science Homework - Grade 4
"Moderate Improvement to Much Improvement" (4 on the scale)

Comments of the Classroom Teachers regarding "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Program" were as follows:

All seven classroom teachers responding to the questionnaire commented that the undergraduate tutorial pilot was the beginning of a good program in which they had the opportunity to participate. Other comments were that the students responded very well to the undergraduate tutors, and were often excited for them to assist in the classroom. The individual assistance

provided was definitely beneficial. The weaker students especially benefited in that individual attention could be provided that is often unavailable in the regular classroom. Assistance could be provided for many children in the forms of computer learning and use of flashcards. Assistance in developing study skills and building of self-esteem were also perceived as being possible.

Among the suggestions for improvement were that tutors should be scheduled to teach the same group of three to four children each visit, and that the classroom teachers should be notified well in advance regarding the times and days their classes would be visited by the tutors.

Perceptions of the Undergraduates serving as tutors were as follows, listed according to frequency of response:

(1) The experience of teaching in the tutorial program brought about more confidence regarding the undergraduates' decisions to become a teacher.

(2) Many practical things were learned regarding the rewards and frustrations of teaching in the classroom.

(3) The undergraduates were exposed to many varied teaching strategies used by the regular classroom teachers.

(4) Various philosophical and historical concepts are better understood when viewed in practical application.

(5) Being treated as professionals with responsibility appeared to help the undergraduates gain a more realistic perspective of the teaching profession.

In summary, there were few absences with regard to the tutors even though no college class time was provided for their

visits to the schools. A master calendar was used to schedule the visits, and the few absences of the tutors were the responsibility of the undergraduate to reschedule at a time convenient to the school. A sense of pride seemed to evolve in that each undergraduate tutor accepted their responsibility in a serious manner and returned from their tutorial assignments with perceptions not easily acquired from a textbook.

Implications were that some adjustments should be made in the tutorial program which were derived from the pilot. During the ensuing semesters, one-half of six tutorial sessions would be scheduled with the same classroom teacher; three would be scheduled with students in different elementary classes. In addition, three observation/participation visits would be assigned to the undergraduates at the secondary school level, but would not be used as a part of the tutorial program. The tutorial program has been continued through the 1996-97 academic year with other undergraduates enrolled in "Introduction to Elementary and Secondary Education".

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